

Third Expert Consultation Meeting on Bald Eagles in the Great Lakes Basin

2.6

ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINANTS IN BALD EAGLES

CAUSES OF MORTALITY IN BALD EAGLES FROM THE GREAT LAKES STATES

J. Christian Franson
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
6006 Schroeder Road
Madison, Wisconsin 53711-6223

From January 1, 1990 through December 31, 1991, 87 bald eagles found dead in the Great Lakes region were submitted to the National Wildlife Health Research Center for necropsy. Of those, 15 were decomposed or otherwise unsuitable for postmortem examination. The leading causes of mortality in the remaining 72 were trauma (16; 22.2%), lead poisoning (13; 18.1%), gunshot (8; 11.1%) and electrocution (8; 11.1%). Emaciation of unknown etiology was diagnosed in eight (11.1%) birds, three (4.2%) died of infectious disease, three (4.2%) of nonspecific causes, one (1.4%) was trapped, and no diagnosis could be reached in 12 (16.7%). The four leading causes of mortality were quite similar to those reported for 1985-1989, except that a variety of toxins were identified during that period and reported in the poisoning category. Lead was the only cause of poisoning identified in 1990 and 1991. These data should not be interpreted to represent actual proportional causes of mortality in bald eagles because of sample bias.